



Libby Peter's Climbing Essentials

No. 3 : Sport Essentials, part 2

Last month we looked at getting started on sport routes. Now you feel you're established as a sport climber you've got two choices; either stick to the grade you're comfortable, and make it more exciting by visiting some exotic locations and tackling multi-pitch sport routes, or start throwing yourself at ever harder climbs. This month we'll cover all these possibilities.

Deciding to climb harder

The first crux is making a conscious decision that you want to push your grade. Maybe you have a magic grade you'd just love to tick, or perhaps you'd simply like to see what you're capable of, either way, the second crux is committing to do something about it.

There are a myriad of physical reasons why you're not climbing as well/hard as you could and should climb. The most common reason being lack of power and/or stamina and poor technique, especially footwork or not being able to read the moves. These weaknesses can be compounded by not warming up properly and by psychological factors such as getting really scared climbing above bolts and getting psyched out. We're not going to address these training and psychological issues here – that's Neil's domain, but a good place to start is to think long and hard about where your strengths and weaknesses lie and focus on those areas where you need to make the most progress.

What we can give you here are some practical tips to help you cut out fuff and unnecessary wasted energy.

Making progress on harder routes

Get the first bolt clipped: Don't mess about worrying you may blow it before the first bolt – if it looks hard use a clip stick or clip it as you lower off an adjacent route.

Red-pointing: Essentially this is practising the moves on a route you can't yet climb until you can eventually make and link them all. You don't have to be climbing in the super-high grades to do this; it's equally as valid if you climb 6a as it is 7a.

As soon as you've blown the on-sight get into red-point mode so you don't tire yourself out. Bolt to bolt your way up the route by resting on every bolt if needs be so you're fresh for each new section. Stick clip any tricky looking sections or awkward clips. Don't hang in there for ages on cruxy sections you're finding hard, have a good go but if its obvious you're not going to make it take the fall, rest and re-try. If this doesn't sound like you, get the rope to the top by the simplest means and top-rope the whole thing.

When you finally go for the red-point leave the quickdraws in, have a good rest and get super focused.

Falling off: You WILL start taking some lobs if you're pushing yourself, so think about falling well and it'll become a less terrifying prospect. Get in the habit of avoiding getting your leg between the rock and the rope as in photo A, to lessen the chance of falling upside down in an unexpected fall. If you know you're going to fall take a moment to compose yourself and cast away from the rock gently so you don't bump and scrape down the wall. See photo B (over page).

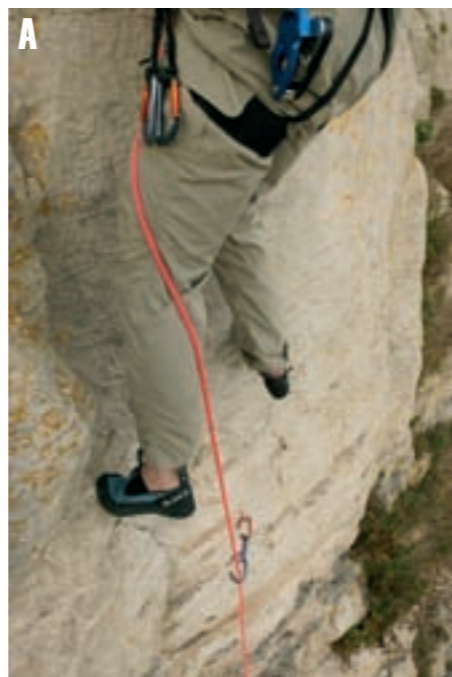


Photo A. Be aware of where the rope is and avoid letting the rope run behind your leg like this. A fall in this position may tip you upside down.

As you swing back in towards the rock bend your knees and try and absorb the impact squarely but with lots of flex through your feet. A dynamic belay will help here, so as the belayer you should try and stop the fall 'softly' by allowing a little movement at the moment the load comes on you rather than stop the fall dead. This is best done by allowing a little slack through (hard to do with modern devices) or being pulled in the air a short way.



Steep ground: Leah Crane on the beautiful tufas of DNA (F7a), the Grot Cave, Kalymnos, Greece. All photography: Mike Robertson.



Photo B. Good in-flight body position! Note the climber has pushed away from the rock slightly to avoid getting scuffed and is using his arms to keep a stable, upright body position in the air.



1. Before you lower off clip a quickdraw between your harness central loop and the rope. This will hold you in next to the route and rock.

2. On really steep routes rather than trying to stay close to the rock the whole time, lower straight down till nearly level with the next bolt then pull in towards it hand over hand on the rope.



3. Grab the quickdraw. You may be able to flick it off the bolt at this point if there's not too much weight on it. If this doesn't work re-clip the extra quickdraw below the bolt. Then you have a choice. Either...

4. Unclip the rope from the bolt. **DON'T LET GO OF THE QUICKDRAW!**

5. Then unclip the quickdraw from the bolt and prepare to swing out.



Stripping steep routes

Getting the quickdraws back out of the route can be exhausting if the rock is steep. Sometimes it's easier to second the climb to retrieve them, otherwise you can use a system as the one outlined here.

...or...

Pull in on the quickdraw and/or rock and flick the quickdraw off the bolt. The quickdraw is still attached to the rope so you can drop it and collect it lower down.

Repeat the above to the lowest bolt. This may be really loaded so very hard to unclip and may be close enough to the ground that when swinging out after unclipping you could deck out. Either unclip but then climb higher back up the route before swinging off, or lower to the ground and climb up to get it after.

Multi-pitch

It's fairly straightforward tackling multi-pitch sport routes, but you do need to consider how to organise a semi-hanging or hanging belay and a multiple abseil descent.

Belays: You can attach to the belay with screwgates and the rope as you would normally (many climbers don't even use screwgates but carry a couple of extra quickdraws instead), or you can use a prepared sling cow's tail. This is a sling or daisy chain larksfooted though your harness with a screwgate to clip to the anchor. Once you're safely attached to at least two bolts you'll need to stack the rope somehow. You can lap it back and forth over the sling/rope attaching you to the belay, or over a foot/leg in folds of ever decreasing size. They can stay here or you can transfer them to a sling and clip it to a bolt. It's worth taking the time to do this neatly so they pay out more smoothly when your partner leads through.

Descent: You need to know the distance between the belay/abseil stations to decide if you need one rope or two. The guidebook should suggest whether you descend the route you've just climbed or an adjacent line. Recommended abseil descents often have abseil stations rigged at 30m intervals so you can use one 60m rope. If you're not sure take an extra rope on the climb!

Libby has been climbing for over 20 years, she is a qualified Mountaineering Instructor and IFMGA Guide and is the author of *Rock Climbing – Essential Skills and Techniques* published by MLTUK. Her base is North Wales from where she runs the guiding outfit Llanberis Guides info@llanberisguides.com



Jane Weir on the steep upper section of *Driven Like the Snow* (F6b+), Blacknor Central, Portland.